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THE NEW DUTY OF AMERICAN COLLEGES

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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THE

INSTALLATION EXERCISES OF THE PRESIDENT OF
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BY

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"Though for a long time," says Marmontel, regarding the violent change in government which he lived through in France—"Though for a long time the situation of public affairs and the fermentation of men's minds through all ranks of the State appeared to threaten the approach of some great crises, it is, nevertheless, true that it (the change of government) happened through the imprudence of those who obstinately persisted in thinking it impossible."

"There are no pages in history more instructive," says Lecky, "and there are few which are more humiliating than those which record the judgments of great thinkers and politicians on the verge of the changes that have most profoundly affected the destiny of mankind."

There are no clear oracles in the temple of nations. There is no sure sign by which nations are warned. The peril is silent, as a thief in the night. We sleep; we wake; and the silver cord has been loosed and the golden bowl broken.

What do such lessons of history mean to us here to-day? Let us see.

A Vice President of the United States has said that American colleges send forth every year 25,000 young men to the battle of modern life, armed with the weapons of the Crusaders.

As it stands, this statement will not do.

College education has been, and is, real education—education of the kind to afford a wide view of human knowledge; of man as he is and has been; of man, therefore, as he may be or should be; of man in his relations to the earth he treads, the air he breathes, the human souls that he associates with.

College education has been so effective in its work that it has come to be a belief, or a tradition, that, other things being equal, the college graduate, wherever placed, can judge better, choose better, act more wisely, advance more rapidly, and, in general, give a more satisfactory account of himself in life's war or life's peace than the man without a college education.

And yet the flippant political criticism that I have quoted has in it a kernel of truth. That is a peculiarity of flippant political criticisms. This is why there are so many flippant political critics. There must always be a half truth to carry along the half falsehood. And this particular half truth is an important one. It refuses to down. It stands at the door and knocks. If not heeded, it still stands and still knocks—again and again and again. It will not be denied. It must be answered.

Education is a part of national life—in a Republic it is a great part of national life. Whether public or private, secular or sectarian, it grows with the growth and shifts with the changes of the Nation. It can no more escape this than can laws, customs, manners, or morals.

Thus it comes that sometimes education is called upon to face new duties, to meet new emergencies, in which not only its hopes, aspirations and possessions, but even its very life, stand at stake.

This, I believe, is the point we are approaching to-day—the point which we have almost reached to-day, and the point which we have been reaching toward for the last 20 years. Is this belief correct? Does education face any new situation of the kind that brings new duties? If so, what is the occasion and what is the duty?

Who will maintain that the American people are what they were 20 years ago?

Some, but not many.

Who will contend that their national aims and ambitions, sentiments, loyalties, and emotions, their ideals of government, their views of present affairs, their hopes of the future, their general habits of mind and their attitude to the laws and institutions of the country proceed along the same lines and within the same limits as in the eighties?

Few—very few.

Who will believe that, if we move as fast toward pure and unlimited democracy in the next 20 years as we have moved in the last 20, we can still have the manners, morals, customs, and political institutions of a representative Republic?

None; absolutely none.

Here, then, is a new situation; and here, with it, is a new duty—a duty that comes to us all and will not be denied, but comes with special force to those men who, as leaders, guides, and followers, teachers, trustees, and students, in high schools, colleges, and universities, make up the forces of American education and embody its cause before and among the American people.

A change of government, a putting away of an old frame, and a putting on of a new one, is a tremendous thing. Whether a representative republic be shaped over into a limitless democracy, or a limitless democracy be shaped over into a limitless monarchy, there are, sooner or later, wrenchings and distresses beyond the power of historians to estimate. They view the field; they do not count the dead, nor measure the misery.

A change of government! What sign is more portentous! And yet it is the sign to-day of many million Americans. Moreover, it is a sign that many other millions of Americans are looking upon with complacency.

Therefore education has the imperative duty to-day to prepare men either to fall in with this mighty change intelligently or to resist it intelligently—to let them know just what are these institutions which it is proposed to bring from other ages and peoples and substitute for the institutions that we now have, just what the process of fitting 100,000,000 human beings to a new frame of government means and just what are the advantages of improving the institutions that a nation has, from generation to generation, rather than casting those institutions upon the rubbish heap and taking from the rubbish heap the institutions cast there by other nations a century or centuries ago.

there is none. What constitution provides for its own subversion? The subversion of a constitution, our Constitution, is not a question of right, but of might. That is all.

But morally—not legally, but morally? Is there, then, no moral right in a people to change its form of government?

Under certain circumstances—yes. From history's viewpoint that moral right exists under certain circumstances, but only under certain circumstances.

If a people be tyrannically and crushingly overtaxed and the public moneys be squandered for private uses against the people's will; if justice be stopped at its fountain and no longer can be obtained between man and man; if the courts be notoriously prejudiced against the people and notoriously servile to the people's rules; if social oppressions and class despotisms become so common and so savage as to poison the lot of man and the life of the family; if the protection of life and property within the border cease to be assured; if the police powers be no longer maintained to safeguard the citizens from within; if the military powers be so weakened or dissipated as to expose the people to repeated invasions from without—for reasons such as these a people may be morally justified for breaking down one form of government and setting up another in its stead.

Yet so painful is the change, so bloody its penalties, so savage its excesses, so cruel its sufferings, so enormous its cost, and so uncertain its consequences that even so—even under any or several of these severe provocations—the moral justification is uncertain and often withheld by posterity.

The question, then, is, Have we a justification—a possible, a tentative justification—for calling down upon us 15 or 20 years hence these penalties and perils by our acts and policies in this country of ours to-day?

Is our substance being confiscated by the taxgatherer? Are our public moneys being seized by our governors for their private uses? Have our courts ceased to dispense justice? Has our family life ceased to be respected? Are we insulted, scorned, and spat upon by our fellow men? Has our Government ceased to keep peace at home or to protect us from abroad?

Not at all; not at all. It is contended that some business enterprises are too rich; that some others are too extensive; that some men do not pay enough taxes; that some railroads issue too many stocks; that some courts are too slow; and that some officeholders are dishonest.

Are such ailments, at worst, sufficient to justify a change in a form of government? They never have been deemed so in the past. Are they to be deemed so now?

That to-day is the epoch-making question which we shall awake some morning to find demanding, demanding of us, an epoch-making answer. And to enable its followers and apostles to make answer intelligently is the trumpet call upon American education at this time.

I anticipate the objection. Education knows no master but truth; education can not descend to the level of the special pleader; education must be as cold as the sword of justice, as inevitable as the law of nature.

True and granted; true and granted. Yet who will deny that it remains even so to education to choose the field in which it shall serve its master, in which it shall pursue its work coldly and reach its conclusions inevitably? None. And it is in choosing one field of active work to-day that American education can discharge its duty to itself, to the Government over it, to the past behind it, to the present with it, to the future beyond it. That one field, that one particular field, often traversed but seldom systematically worked, is the field of political history, political institutions, political theory, and political practice.

There are courses and classes in most institutions of higher education, but I do not recall any just now in which, whatever else he may do, the young man in search of a liberal education is required systematically and successively, from year to year, to learn why this representative Republic is what it is, wherein it differs from the republics and democracies and monarchies of the past and the present; what came to it from Sparta, from Athens, from Rome, from the Italian Republics, from the Free Cities, from Switzerland, from the Netherlands, from France, from England; why one thing was taken and another left in the building of its framework, and what is the nature of the once rejected materials which the American people to-day are urged to bring back and substitute for the materials out of which their frame of government was constructed a century and a quarter ago.

When, in times like these, we find the graduates of American institutions of learning—thousands of them—going up and down the land to exhibit as new things the designs and devices of government which antedate the calendar, antedate the Christian era, almost antedate authentic history, is it surprising to hear the complaint that there is a new occasion and a new duty to which American education has failed to rise?

I conceive it to be an educational duty, a college duty, to meet this complaint, and, as far as in me lies, to see to it that, for one, Marietta College assures to her graduates henceforth, in addition to the liberal education she so loyally and competently provides, a special education in the problems which, for lack of a better phrase, we term the problems of the day.

I conceive it to be an educational duty, here and now, for this institution to begin teaching the students, from freshman year, what this representative Republic is, whence its elements came, what it is proposed to substitute for it, and whence the substitute materials come. I conceive it to be an educational duty to let every student who goes hence with his diploma go hence with knowledge to test the alternative pressed so insistently on every American citizen to-day—the alternative between representative republic and social democracy. I conceive it to be an educational duty to implant in every student's mind at least the verdict of history on such a government as is proposed to us.

I conceive this to be an educational duty that should be, must be, discharged under the sword of justice and the sun of truth, and, when so discharged, must be trusted to bring its reward.

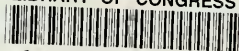
If this representative Republic is to endure as a representative republic the men of Marietta will then have done in their sphere

all that truth can do to make it endure. If this representative Republic is to give way to a limitless democracy the men of Marietta will then be best equipped for the supermanly duties that await them. And so, whether as steadfast advocates or fiery assailants of this representative Republic, they will at least know why they are, what they are, and not go railing up and down the land with the stamp of college education on their brows and the clamor of hissing parrots on their tongues.

He who would be free must first be just. He who would know liberty must first know truth. Let us follow that light. A new occasion and a new duty are here. Let us follow that light and trust that it will not fail, for the truth, and the truth alone, can keep us free.



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